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ABSTRACT

Because the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) sets accreditation standards specifying that undergraduate business programs should concentrate their professional courses in the last 2 years of a 4-year program, and should offer only a limited amount of work below the junior year, community college transfer students typically lose a year or more of college work when they decide to pursue a baccalaureate degree in an accredited AACSB program. The severity of this problem is affected by the number of transfer options available to the students, and the particular state's position on programmatic accreditation. Compounding the problem is the preponderance of adult students attending community colleges, who "back into" higher education, taking a few business courses to enhance their job skills, move on to an associate degree, and then decide to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Unfortunately, virtually none of their technical credits will transfer and they must retake the same courses to earn the bachelor's degree. The AACSB has created a set of prescriptive standards without research or scholarly inquiry to support their educational basis. The Division of Eligibility and Agency Evaluation (DEAE) acknowledged the community colleges' concerns in 1980 and granted a 2-year (rather than the typical 4-year) renewal of recognition to the AACSB, directing the agency to give special attention to the situation. In 1983, the AACSB was granted the normal 4-year renewal in the absence of any third party input. The AACSB will approach the DEAE again in 1987 at which time community colleges are urged to represent their position in a continuing effort to reform the situation. (EJV)

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TWO-YEAR COLLEGES AND THE AACSB

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July, 1986

During the Spring, 1987, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, will once again reexamine the credentials of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), a specialized accreditation body which regulates the educational activities of more than two hundred baccalaureate and masters degree programs in the United States. Because AACSB standards specify that "an undergraduate school of business should concentrate its professional courses in the last two years of a four-year program, and should offer only a limited amount of work below the junior year,"[1] it has been on a collision course with two-year colleges, especially as the Associate of Applied Business degrees have become increasingly popular during the past decade.

Perhaps the most articulate spokesman for the two-year colleges' point of view in regard to the AACSB controversy has been Allen T. Bonnell, recently retired president of the Community College of Philadelphia. A shortened form of Bonnell's extremely thoughtful paper, "Prescriptive Specialized Accreditation: A Case Study of Implications for Urban Community Colleges," appeared recently in Fred Kintzer's book, **Improving Articulation and Transfer Relationships.** The essay highlighted

the obstacles created by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business.

Essentially, AACSB regulations prohibit member institutions from allowing students to earn business credits during their freshman or sophomore years. That means that most community college transfer students -- who typically have earned 20-40 credit hours of business credits -- will lose a year or more of college work should they decide to continue toward a bachelor of science degree in an accredited AACSB program.

Bonnell explained that he was concerned about this problem because the Community College of Philadelphia had for years sent many of its graduates to neighboring Temple University. When Temple's business department decided to seek accreditation, it was soon discovered that AACSB accreditation standards would not permit the free flow of CCP's graduates into Temple's business programs. AACSB refused to permit Temple business division to follow a carefully constructed articulation agreement between the two schools. Because Temple stood to lose a large number of transfer students, it joined CCP in arguing the issue during a series of hearings at COPA between 1978 and 1982, ultimately with no success. Bonnell said that since Philadelphia has 74 colleges, CCP students simply found alternatives other than Temple.

In northeastern Ohio, the answer is not so easy since our students have fewer transfer choices. Virtually all of the public four-year institutions and many of the private have sought and received accreditation from the AACSB, partially because the state controlling board, the Ohio Board of Regents, has pushed

AACSB accreditation as a standard for business programs.

Compounding the problem is the preponderance of adult students making up our enrollment. Adults are least responsive to curricular prescriptions. They are most likely to take business credits, since the coursework relates directly to their working life. Their pattern is to "back into" higher education; they start with a few accounting courses, complete an associate's degree, and then decide to continue on toward a baccalaureate degree. Several surveys at our campus over the past year have shown that approximately two-thirds of our AAB degree graduates, as well as seventy percent of current students working toward AAB degrees, plan to continue to a four-year degree. Unfortunately, these accounting, business management, and data processing majors find, when they try to transfer to a four-year school, virtually none of the technical credits transfer and they have to retake the very same courses -- often with the same textbooks and occasionally with the same instructors -- in order to earn the B.S. degree.

While AACSB does not flatly state that two-year college business credits may not be counted toward four-year degrees, it requires "validation procedures each time a student takes a course at the lower division level which the degree-granting institution offers at the upper division level and which is to be accepted for upper division credit in business administration or economics."[2] This is required "whether or not an articulation agreement is present." It is this particular standard that prohibits local initiatives that would allow the business

faculties of two institutions to sit down together and draft a workable articulation agreement.

In a recent letter to Alison Bernstein, Program Office for Community Colleges at the Ford Foundation, I outlined my concerns with the AACSB. She responded in a fashion all too typical of the rigid attitudes associated with thorny articulation issues, writing, "Frankly, these students [business students at community colleges] should be counseled against pursuing 20-40 credits of business at the community college level. A more appropriate strategy would involve at most two or three courses--roughly the introductory to a major."

The fact is that most community college students have no notion that they can or will continue toward a four-year degree. If advised against taking business courses, they will simply take no courses at all, or turn to a proprietary school to get the education and training they want. The principal difficulty is the student will do what seems reasonable to him and, in fact, beginning with occupationally-related courses probably is a very reasonable course of action. Most community college students will never complete a degree program; therefore, why not emerge with enhanced vocational skills.

The minority of students who do complete associate degrees, having successfully completed two years of higher education, graduate with a much greater degree of confidence in their ability to compete at a collegiate level. Is it surprising that two-thirds are not content to stop with a so-called "terminal" degree? Does it make any sense at all that these students should

be forced to retake a year or more of credits, typically at taxpayer expense, in order to satisfy the requirements of an AACSB-accredited baccalaureate program?

Ironically, AACSB has created the problem of prescriptive standards without any research or scholarly inquiry that might support their educational basis. Milton Blood, current director of the AACSB, admitted there is no philosophical or pedagogical justification for the curricular prescriptions. Blood said that there is a "general feeling" among his members that general education classes should be completed before taking business courses. Business faculties at Ohio community colleges have a more pragmatic view, noting that the AACSB prescriptions serve to protect enrollments at the senior institutions.

Perhaps the most dangerous element in the AACSB's point of view is that a nationally-accepted specialized accrediting agency is limiting the mission of the community or two-year college to providing general education. Clearly, the contemporary community college can and does provide significant undergraduate instruction in business as well as other technical/professional fields.

* * *

In September, 1980, AACJC and AICS testified at Division of Eligibility and Agency Evaluation (DEAE) hearings on AACSB in Washington, D.C. The third party complaints were voiced in a number of areas and, while DEAE staff for the most part did not find fault with AACSB, the staff had "misgivings about the agency's compliance with criterion (c)(4)(reflects community of

interests). A large fraction of the members of the agency's policy and decision-making bodies consists of deans of accredited business schools. The agency should describe what is the community of interests directly affected by the scope of its accreditation, and how the membership of its decision-making bodies reflects those interests. The fact that community and junior colleges offering business programs have for several years been complaining that AACSB/AC accreditation policies and practices are affecting them adversely suggests that there is at least one element in what apparently should be the agency's community of interests which is not adequately reflected in the composition of its policy and decision-making bodies.[3]

The staff went on to recommend either of two alternatives: (1) defer action for six months to enable all parties to respond to issues raised in the analysis, or (2) award continuation of recognition for a period of one year [instead of the typical four-year renewal of recognition]. On September 16, 1980, the Director of DEAE recommended the "continuation of recognition for a period of two years, and directed the agency to give special attention to demonstrating compliance with criterion (b)(1)(i)(consideration of constituencies) in its next petition for renewal of recognition."[4]

While community colleges had, thus, won a limited victory in getting DEAE to recognize its concerns, no third parties attended the recertification hearings in 1983, two years later. DEAE staff, hearing nothing to the contrary, assumed that the problems had been solved. AACSB was handed a four-year renewal absent of

any of the qualifying language appended in the 1980 hearing.

AACSB is, however, seeking recertification once again in the Spring, 1987. It is crucial that two-year colleges represent their position in a continuing attempt to reform the situation. Lakeland is currently in the process of surveying its business degree graduates in order to furnish case histories which document the problems caused by AACSB standards. It is suggested that other two-year colleges conduct similar research and that we work together to solve this very major obstacle facing our students.

Notes

[1]Accreditation Council Policies and Standards, American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, St. Louis, MO. 1985-86, p. 28.

[2]Ibid., p. 22.

[3]"DEAE Staff Comments on Concerns Raised by Third Parties and by Staff Regarding Compliance with Some of the Criteria for Recognition by the Accreditation Council of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business," U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Accreditation. September, 1980, p. 6.

[4]Proffitt, John R., Director, Division of Eligibility and Agency Evaluation, OPE. "Report on Recommendations by the Ad Hoc Interagency Committee on Accreditation," U.S. Department of Education Memorandum dated September 16, 1980, p. 6.

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